



## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST



**Request Number:** F-2011-03921

**Keyword:** Organisational Information/Governance

**Subject:** Civilianisation of BRC/UCMC

### Request and Answer:

#### Question

I would like all information written, electronic or otherwise, in relation to meetings correspondence or other communications regarding the civilianisation of Belfast Regional Control (BRC)/ Urban Contact Management Centre (UCMC) and the relocation of police officers and staff currently employed there.

I am aware of the previous FOI request which gave information up to about June 2010 so I will specify my request should include information from 1st June 2010 until the date of this request. This date excludes the PIU report as mentioned further below.

I will be more specific as I wish the information to include the PIU report specifically into BRC, and any other amendments this document, I also request any recommendations/correspondence regarding same. I would like to clarify dates in relation to the PIU report, I would like to avail of the PIU report irrespective of the timeline, should it have been commenced/published prior to my date mentioned of 1st June 2010 I want it included in this request.

I would hope in this time of openness and transparency this will not be an issue

Note that this request also relates to records in relation to any review of BRC/UCMC whether leading to civilianisation or not and to any interim reports relating to ongoing work.

#### Answer

Your request for information has now been considered and the decision has been taken not to supply the information you have requested.

Section 17(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 requires the Police Service of Northern Ireland, when refusing to provide such information (because the information is exempt) to provide you the applicant with a notice which:

- (a) states that fact,
- (b) specifies the exemption in question and
- (c) states (if not otherwise apparent) why the exemption applies.

The exemption/s, as well as the factors the Department considered when deciding where the public interest lies, are listed below:

### Section 36 (2) (b) (i) and (ii) Effective Conduct of Public Affairs

**Sections 36** is a prejudice based, qualified exemption which means that it is the Public Authority's responsibility to evidence the harm in release and carry out a public interest test.

A summary is provided below:

#### **Harm**

The information held relates to a review of the efficiency and effectiveness of BRC carried out by the Process Improvement Unit (PIU). The information has been collated as part of a review of BRC undertaken on behalf of ACC Operational Support Department and the Service Excellence Programme Board. If the findings and recommendations of the project were released at this stage it would be likely to inhibit the ability of the Process Improvement Unit to perform future reviews or provide advice. The PIU unit carry out an important role in the identification of weaknesses in PSNI systems and processes and there is a certain expectation that their reports will be seen only by senior managers and the departments who engage them to conduct such reviews. Disclosure of this report would harm their ability to express themselves openly, honestly and completely or to explore all options fully. It would also be likely to inhibit the imparting or commissioning of advice or the offering or requesting of opinions or considerations. Staff do not expect that the views they express under these circumstances will be released into the public domain and there is a certain expectation of confidentiality. It is likely that release would be detrimental to the ultimate quality of decision making within the PSNI and undermine the review into BRC.

#### **Public Interest Test**

##### Factors Favouring Release

Open policy making may lead to increased trust and engagement between the PSNI, its employees and the general public. There is a public interest in disclosing information which ensures that there is transparency in the way in which the PSNI conducts itself. Knowledge that arguments relating to a department's ability to achieve objectives will be disclosable will in fact improve the quality of those arguments, therefore the prospect of disclosure would enhance the quality of advice and lead to fuller and franker discussion about BRC.

##### Factors Favouring Retention

There is a strong public interest in maintaining an efficient and effective Police Service. Internal reviews are recognised as an essential way to ensure assessments are made of the overall adequacy and effectiveness of a business area. Disclosure would inhibit the free and frank provision of advice and the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation. The Process Improvement Unit need to have the confidence of staff in the business areas they are reviewing, to ensure they will communicate freely. Interviewed staff members would also be unwilling to provide an honest opinion about their work environment if they thought that their opinions would be released into the public domain. The possibility of disclosure would make people less likely to engage in discussion (oral or written) as part of the deliberative process and future decision making processes. As a result solutions and options would be limited.

#### **Decision**

I have decided that the public interest in disclosure of any information containing expressions of opinions and advice in relation to the future of BRC is outweighed by the public interest in withholding

this information. At this time, disclosure may lead to less candid and robust discussions, difficult choices being avoided and the quality of the Police Service being undermined.

If you have any queries regarding your request or the decision please do not hesitate to contact me on 028 9070 0164. When contacting the Freedom of Information Team, please quote the reference number listed at the beginning of this letter.

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible, or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Head of Freedom of Information, PSNI Headquarters, 65 Knock Road, Belfast, BT5 6LE or by emailing [foi@psni.pnn.police.uk](mailto:foi@psni.pnn.police.uk).

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you were to remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request you may make a complaint, under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the PSNI has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. You can write to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out, however the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Please be advised that PSNI replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ [www.psni.police.uk](http://www.psni.police.uk)

Personal details in respect of your request have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.